



## **WDVA Sec. Mary Kolar: We Are Joyously (and Cautiously) Opening the Doors at The Wisconsin Veterans Homes**

We have all been anxiously awaiting the day that we can be back together again, and I am excited to share with you that, for the members at Wisconsin's Veterans Homes, the day has come! This week, we began joyously (and very cautiously) welcoming our family and friends back to all three of our Veterans Home facilities.

Our Homes in King and Union Grove began allowing in-room visits for members and families on Monday, while our Veterans Home at Chippewa Falls got a short head start and opened to in-room visits last week. While virtual check ins and greetings through windows were a lifeline during the past 12 months, for many of our veterans, nothing replaces a face-to-face visit. It has been wonderful to hear about and see pictures of the long-awaited reunions between members and their loved ones and we are thrilled to be able to make this happen.

As I write this message, we have zero cases of COVID-19 among our Veterans Homes members. Is that a light at the end of the tunnel we're seeing? Maybe, but we certainly aren't there yet. Our number one priority remains the health and safety of our members and staff. To keep these in-room visits going, we must continue to maintain a low community virus positivity rate, limited facility (staff and member) positive cases, and a high vaccination rate. We are still in the midst of a global pandemic, so we will continue to weigh the risks of each of our services, follow the guidelines set by the CDC and others, and determine what we can safely do in this environment to provide the best possible quality of life for our veterans living on campus.

We haven't totally defeated the virus yet and we need everyone's help in keeping community spread low. For our veterans, please continue to take precautions against COVID-19 by staying home as much as possible, wearing a mask when out, remaining six feet away from others, and frequently washing your hands. I also urge you to get vaccinated against COVID-19 if you haven't already. Every person who gets vaccinated helps us to bring an end this pandemic and protect the vulnerable population that we serve at our Wisconsin Veterans Homes. At the same time, we will celebrate these small steps forward and enjoy this milestone for our Veterans Home members, staff, family and friends.

*Mary Kolar is the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs. Secretary Kolar was commissioned in the United States Navy in 1980, served on active duty for 28 years, and retired as a Captain (O-6). As Secretary, she is responsible for advocating for the approximately 350,000 veterans in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and nation.*